

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5957  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3049

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINT, IS  
SUBJECT: SIZING UP THE KNESSET ELECTION CAMPAIGN

BEGIN SUMMARY:WITH TWO WEEKS TO GO, THE PARTIES HAVE  
YET TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE ISSUES DISTURBING THIS  
COUNTRY. PERSONALITIES AND ALOGANS ARE MORE EVIDENT  
IN CAMPAIGN STRATEGY THAN IS SERIOUS DEBATE. WHILE THE  
ALIGNMENT, LIKUD AND DMC DIRECT THEIR CAMPAIGNS AT  
EACH OTHER WITH THE AVOWED PURPOSE OF HEADING THE  
NEXT GOVERNMENT,THE OTHER PARTIES EXPECTED TO WIN  
SEATS REFLECT THE MORE MODEST GOAL OF ACQUIRING SUF-  
FICIENT REPRESENTATION TO INFLUENCE FUTURE POLICY.  
END SUMMARY.

1. WITH LITTLE MORE THAN TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTION,  
THE CAMPAIGN IS IN FULL SWING. NEWSPAPER ADS SHOUT AT  
THE READER, EMPTY WALL SPACES OF CITY STREETS ARE  
QUICKLY FILLING UP WITH CAMPAIGN POSTERS, TV TIME FOR  
THE CAMPAIGN COMMERCIALS HAS BEEN SET ASIDE NIGHTLY  
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AT 9:30 IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE EVENING NEWS, AND  
NORMALLY ACCESSIBLE POLITICIANS ARE ON THE HUSTINGS  
AND GENERALLY UNAVAILABLE TO NON-VOTERS LIKE THE  
DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY.ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO LACK OF  
ISSUES,THEIR TREATMENT HAS BEEN SUPERFICIAL AND NO  
SINGLE ONE HAS YET DOMINATED THE CAMPAIGN.IN THE  
MEANTIME, PERSONALITIES FIGURE MORE PROMINENTLY IN

CAMPAIGN ADS, SPEECHES AND LITERATURE THAN DO ISSUES. THERE IS A CERTAIN MADISON AVENUE SLICKNESS TO THE ADS, NEW TO ISRAELI CAMPAIGNS, THAT REFLECTS THE HAND OF PR FIRMS RATHER THAN POLITICANS. THE RESULT THUS FAR IS AN UNEDIFYING,SHALLOW CAMPAIGN THAT WOULD PERHAPS BE MORE APPROPRIATE FOR INTRODUCING A NEW LAUNDRY DETERMGENT OR CIGARETTE BRAND.

2. THERE IS WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT THAT FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS THE ELECTION OF THE NINTH KNESSET APPEARS MORE DIFFICULT TO FORECAST THAN ITS PREDECESSORS. IN ADDITION TO THE SUDDEN CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE ALIGNMENT, THE MANY SCANDALS PLAGUING THE PARTY, AND THE FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE OF A NEW PARTY (DMC), THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN MEMORY THAT HISTADRUT ELECTIONS WILL NOT PRECEDE THE KNESSET ELECTION, PROVIDING A BELLWETHER FOR THE RESULTS OF THE LATTER POLL AND A SORT OF DRESS REHEARSAL FOR THE KNESSET CAMPAIGN.

3. THE ALIGNMENT. EACH PARTY CULTIVATES A CERTAIN STYLE GEARED TO ITS OBJECTIVES AND THE SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION IT IS ATTEMPTING TO INFLUENCE. THE ALIGNMENT, OF COURSE, IS TRYING TO MAINTAIN ITS NUMBER ONE POSITION. HOWEVER DISCERNIBLE LATELY IS A RAISING OF ITS SIGHTS TO THE GOAL OF ACHIEVING A KNESSET MAJORITY. WHILE FEW SERIOUSLY BELIEVE THIS IS LIKELY, THIS AMBITION IS SAID TO REFLECT PERES' INPUT AND IS A MEASURE OF THE PARTY'S DOGGED DETERMINATION DESPITE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ITS VICISSITUDES.THE ALIGNMENT'S CAMPAIGN MACHINERY WAS SLOW IN GETTING STARTED,HAVING BEEN CONTINUOUSLY THROWN OFF BALANCE BY THE STRING OF PARTY CRISES AND SET-BACKS OF THE PAST FEW MONTHS. EVEN NOW IT IS FIGHTING TO OVERCOME THE ADVERSE PUBLICITY SURROUNDING ABBA EBAN AND THE COMPTROLLER' REPORT.

4. AT THE SAME TIME,STUNG BY THE SUCCESS OF THE DMC'S EMPHASIS ON CHANGE, THE ALIGNMENT IS ATTEMPTING TO COMBAT ITS IMAGE OF MORE OF THE SAME BY STRESSING ITS NEW LEADERSHIP. IT HITS BACK AT THE DMC BY POINTING OUT THAT ALL OF THE TOPDMC CANDIDATES COME FROM THE THREE MAJOR CITIES (AND FROM GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS AT THAT) WHILE THE ALIGNMENT CAN BOAST A FAIR PROPOROTIN OF WOMEN, ORIENTALS, YOUTH, KIBBUTZNIKS AND REPRESENTATION FROM ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AMONG ITS CANDIDATES.

5. PROMINENT IN THE ALIGNMENT'S CAMPAIGN IS THE SCARE TACTICS USED AGAINST THE LIKUD. THE ALIGNMENT DOES ITS

BEST TO PREVENT THE LIKUD FROM OVERCOMING ITS IMAGE AS THE WAR PARTY. IN ONE TV PRESENTATION, IT PORTRAYS A FREIGHTENED NATION AFTER WAKING UP TO FIND THE LIKUD IN POWER. "WILL IT MEAN USING THE IDF TO BREAK STRIKES? WHAT ABOUT GENEVA?" THE BEWILDERED ACTORS ASK. THROUGHOUT ITS CAMPAIGN THE ALIGNMENT ADS REPEAT THAT VOTING FOR THE DMC, SHELI, ETC., IS REALLY A VOTE FOR THE LIKUD.

6. THE LIKUD. THIS LATTER POINT IS THE OVERRIDING THEME OF THE LIKUD - ONLY IN REVERSE. IT CONTINUOUSLY DRUMS OUT THE MESSAGE: "THERE IS ONLY ONE PARTY THAT CAN EFFECT A CHANGE IN ADMINISTRATION - THE LIKUD." ITS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY CONCENTRATES ON THE ALIGNMENT, ONLY OCCASIONALLY ATTACKING THE DMC AMONG THE LESSER PARTIES AS A JUNIOR VERSION OF THE LABOR PARTY. IT IS WELL ORGANIZED FOR THE CAMPAIGN, AND AS A BLOC RATHER THAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A SINGLE PARTY SUCCESSFULLY PROJECTS AN IMAGE OF UNITY. IN CONTRAST TO THE PICTURE OF THE ALIGNMENT, WITH LABOR IN PARTNERSHIP WITH A RELUCTANT MAPAM, THE LIKUD APPEARS MONOLITHIC UNDER THE UNDISPUTED LEADERSHIP OF A BENEVOLENT MENAHEM BEGIN.

7. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR HOW MUCH BEGIN'S ILLNESS HAS AFFECTED THE LIKUD'S CAMPAIGN. HE HAS BEGUN APPEARING IN LIKUD'S TV COMMERCIALS, LOOKING THINNER AND OLDER AS A RESULT OF HIS HEART ATTACK. HE IS EXPECTED TO DEBATE PERES ON MAY 12 IN A FORTH-MINUTE TELEVISED PROGRAM SIMILAR TO THE CARTER-FORD DEBATES (WHICH BEGIN VERY ATTENTIVELY VIEWED AT THE EMBASSY). BY THEN, HE SHOULD BE MAKING PERSONAL APPEARANCES AROUND THE COUNTRY, BUT ON A RELATIVELY RELAXED SCHEDULE. ALTHOUGH SOME BELIEVE HIS ILLNESS MAY GENERATE A SYMPATHY VOTE, WE FEEL THAT IT HAS HURT THE LIKUD CAMPAIGN AND ITS PROSPECTS. SYMPATHY WILL PROBABLY BE A FACTOR ONLY AMONG THOSE INCLINED TO VOTE FOR THE LIKUD ANYWAY. OTHER VOTERS SEE THAT THE PARTY'S SECOND-RANKERS, WHETHER IT BE THE COLORLESS SIMCHA ERHLICH OR THE IMPULSIVE, IMMODERATE EZIR WEIZMAN, LACK LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AND THIS, WITH BEGIN IN QUESTIONABLE HEALTH, MAY WELL TURN THEM AWAY FROM THE LIKUD. THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE IN THE LIKUD'S CAMPAIGN THAT CONSTRUCTIVELY ADDRESSES ISRAEL'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. MUCH OF ITS PREACHING SEEMS AIMED AT THE ALREADY CONVERTED.

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
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8. DMC. OFF TO A BOOMING START SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, IT  
NOW APPEARS TO HAVE FALTERED. ALTHOUGH YADIN SEEMS TO  
HAVE EMERGED FROM THE HAOLOM HAZE'S ACCUSATIONS UNHARMED,  
THE PARTY HAS LOST SOME OF ITS FRESHNESS AND  
"VOICE OF THE PEOPLE" AURA. IT CONTINUES TO HAMMER  
AWAY AT THEMES THAT HAVE WIDE ACCEPTANCE; STIFLING  
BUREAUCRACY, CRIPPLING STRIKES, MALDISTRIBUTION OF  
WEALTH, ETC., BUT THERE IS SOME QUESTION WHETHER  
SHMEL TAMIR, FORMERLY OF THE FREE CENTER, LIKUD, HERUT ETC.,  
AND FAR FROM A FRESH FACE, HAS NOT CAPTURED THE PARTY  
--A DOUBT ON WHICH THE ALIGNMENT HAS CLEVERLY  
CAPITALIZED IN ONE OF ITS FEATURED ADS. BUT  
THE DMC'S BIGGEST PROBLEM IS THE ABSENCE OF  
ORIENTAL OR WORKING CLASS ISRAELIS FROM ITS LIST. IN A SENSE ITS  
EXPERIMENT IN OPEN VOTING FOR THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES WAS  
TOO SUCCESSFUL. ALL THE PROMINENT NAMES WON,  
LEAVING NO ROOM AT THE TOP FOR THE LESSER LIGHTS.  
THE DMC IS THUS VULNERABLE TO CHARGES THAT IT IS  
AN UPPER AND MIDDLE CLASS PARTY OF INTELLECTUALS  
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WHICH HAS LITTLE IN COMMON WITH LABORERS OR VOTERS  
IN THE AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS.

9. MOREOVER, SOME PERCEIVE A FLAW IN ITS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY: IT IS REACHING TOO FAR. UNLIKE ALL THE OTHER SMALLER PARTIES WHICH SPEAK OF MERELY GAINING STRENGTH SO AS TO BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, THE DMC WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON THOROUGHGOING CHANGE TALKS OF REPLACING THE ALIGNMENT, I.E., WINNING THE ELECTION--SOMETHING THE VOTERS FIND UNBELIEVABLE. FEW DOUBT THAT AT BEST THE DMC WILL BE ONLY A JUNIOR PARTNER IN A COALITION AND, THEREFORE, FORCED TO COMPROMISE MANY OF ITS PRINCIPLES. AS A CONSEQUENCE, THE CYNICAL ISRAELI ELECTORATE DOES NOT SEE MUCH POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE IN THE DMC.

10. NRP. ISRAEL'S MAJOR RELIGIOUS PARTY ASPIRES TO BE INDISPENSABLE TO THE NEXT COALITION. HAVING RECEIVED ABOUT EIGHT PERCENT OF THE 1973 VOTE, ITS SIGHTS ARE SET ON CAPTURING A LARGER SHARE OF THE VOTES OF OBSERVANT ISRAELIS, WHO ARE SAID TO NUMBER 25-30 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. BECAUSE OF ITS INTRA-PARTY STRUGGLES (INVOLVING PRINCIPALLY THE OUSTER OF YITZHAK RAPHAEL) ITS CAMPAIGN WAS SLOW GETTING STARTED. ITS APPROACH TENDS TO BE LOW KEYED, STRESSING THE PARTY'S IMPORTANCE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND PRESERVING TRADITIONAL VALUES, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME SAYING IT IS A NEW NRP (WITHOUT RAPHAEL) WITH A NEW LEADERSHIP. SO FAR IT HAS STEERED CLEAR OF DISCUSSING ITS HARDLINE FOREIGN POLICY POSITIONS, SEEN STIFFENING AS A RESULT OF CHANGES IN ITS LEADERSHIP. BUT ASIDE FROM ITS FACTIONS AND THE SCARS LEFT FROM ITS INTERNAL STRUGGLES, THERE IS A BASIC RIFT IN THE PARTY THAT MAY COST VOTES. THE DIVISION IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BETWEEN ONE CAMP LED BY YOSEF BURG FAVORING THE PARTY'S TRADITIONAL PRO-ALIGNMENT STANCE AND ANOTHER BUILT AROUND THE YOUTH FACTION WITH ITS PRO-LIKUD POSITION.

1. SHELI. THIS LEFTIST BLOC EMPHASIZES ITS BASIC COMMITMENT TO PEACE, FOR WHICH IT IS PREPARED TO TALK TO PALESTINIAN ARABS INCLUDING THE PLO. ALTHOUGH A SMALL PARTY (ITS MEMBERSHIP IS A MERE FRACTION OF THE DMC'S) IT HAS FIELDDED THREE PROMINENT PERSONALITIES IN THE RACE: ARYE ELIAV, MEIR PE'IL AND URI AVNERI. ITS IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE IS TO ATTRACT MAPAM VOTERS UNCOMFORTABLE IN THE ALIGNMENT. SHELI'S PITCH IS THAT MAPAM

HAS SOLD OUT; THAT IT IS BURIED IN THE ALIGNMENT  
AND WITHOUT INFLUENCE.

12. OTHERS. AMONG THE SMALLER PARTIES, THE TWO  
AGUDAH FACTIONS HAVE A LIMITED BUT LOYAL  
CONSTITUENCY AND THEIR CAMPAIGN IS GENERALLY  
RESTRICTED TO THAT AUDIENCE. THEY ARE EXPECTED  
TO MAINTAIN THEIR CURRENT REPRESENTATION OF FIVE  
IN THE KNESSET, GIVE OR TAKE ONE. SHULAMIT ALONI'S  
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE OLDER AND MORE SOLID  
ILP ARE IN AN UPHILL BATTLE TO HOLD THEIR OWN  
AGAINST THE INROADS OF THE DMC. THE CAMPAIGN OF  
ARIK SHARON'S SHLOMZION PARTY, APPARENTLY HAMSTRUNG  
BY LACK OF FUNDS (AND PERHAPS ENTHUSIASM), IS SO  
FAR BARELY VISIBLE. ITS OCCASIONAL NEWSPAPER ADS  
TOUT SHARON AS THE CHOICE OF DEFENSE MINISTER AND  
SUGGEST A COMBINATION WITH THE LIKUD. IT MAY WIN  
ONE OR POSSIBLY TWO SEATS BUT FEW BELIEVE THAT  
IF LEFT OUTSIDE THE COALITION SHARON WOULD BE  
CONTENT AS HEAD OF A TINY FACTION IN THE KNESSET. AFTER  
THE ELECTION HE IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE HIS EFFORTS  
TO MERGE WITH A LARGER  
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PARTY WHICH WERE CUT SHORT BY THE FILING DATE  
DEADLINE ON APRIL 12.

13. ASIDE FROM RAKAH AND THE TWO ARAB LISTS  
(SEE TEL AVIV 2882 FOR A DISCUSSION OF THEIR  
PERSPECTS), THE ABOVE ARE THE PARTIES WITH AT  
LEAST SOME CHANCE OF EMERGING WITH A SIGNIFICANT  
KNESSET REPRESENTATION. ONE OR MORE OF THE 22  
PARTIES RUNNING (OF THE 23 THAT FILED, ONE WAS  
DISQUALIFIED FOR HAVING IRREGULARITIES IN ITS  
APPLICATION) MAY WIN A SINGLE SEAT, BUT THIS  
WOULD HAVE LITTLE EFFECT ON THE BALANCE OF FORCES  
IN THE NINTH KNESSET. ALTHOUGH THIS CAMPAIGN  
IS IN MANY WAYS UNPRECEDENTED IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY,  
THE MAJOR FORCES IN CONTENTION,  
EXCEPT FOR THE DMC, REMAIN MUCH THE SAME AS THEY HAVE BEEN IN EARLIER  
ELECTIONS. ONE IS AGAIN REMINDED OF THE VOTING  
CONSERVATISM OF THE ISRAELI ELECTORATE WHICH,  
DESPITE THE WAVES OF IMMIGRATION  
SINCE STATEHOOD AND THE VARIED BACKGROUND OF THE  
POPULATION, HAS MANDATED COALITION GOVERNMENTS  
WITH LITTLE VARIATION IN COMPOSITION THROUGHOUT  
EIGHT PREVIOUS ELECTIONS.  
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